National Culture, Self-construal and an Individual’s Work Goals:
A (Preliminary) Test of an Integrated Model

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ABSTRACT. The concept of work goals is an established construct that measures the end states which individuals desire and expect through work. The antecedents of work goals have typically been viewed as shaped by national identity or individual-level self-construal of values and motivations. In this paper we develop and test a simple integrated model of the relationship between national identity and individual level value orientations and two work goals: extrinsic and intrinsic rewards. Using data from a survey of business students, we find strong support that the relationship between national identity and work goals is mediated by individual self-construal. The possible moderating effect of cultural adaptation on these relationships is also explored and supported. (113 words)

Key words: work goals, national identity, self-construal, cultural adaptation, HRM

INTRODUCTION

Our aim in this paper is to develop and test an integrated model of the impact of national identity and individual self-construal on two work goals: extrinsic and intrinsic rewards. Typically, national identity and individual self-construal have been viewed as competing explanations of work goals and related values and behaviours. Hofstede (1980, 2001), for instance, has described national identity as the ‘programming of the mind’, which has a pervasive effect on values and behaviours. Triandis (1989a, 1989b), in contrast, has rejected this view in favour of an approach that considers the individual-level construction, or self-construal, of values and links these to a range of work orientations and behaviours. Our starting point is to suggest that national identity and self-construal may both play a role in shaping work goals. We therefore propose a model in which self-construal mediates the relationship between national identity and work goals. We test this model using a sample of undergraduate business students drawn from Australia, Asia and Africa. We also examine the potential effects of cultural adaptation – that is, the adaptation of individuals from one national identity who work and live in another with distinctively different attributes – on the relationships between national identity, individual self-construal and work goals.

WHAT SHAPES WORK GOALS: NATIONAL CULTURE OR SELF CONSTRUAL?

The concept of work goals captures “the end states that individuals desire and expect through working” (Bu and McKeen 2001:166). The term work goals has been used interchangeably with terms such as ‘work values’ (Ros, Schwartz and Surkiss 1999); ‘job orientation’ (Manhardt 1972); and desired ‘job characteristics’ (Burke 1966). Work goals are seen as important in shaping both
individual expectations of work, their response to specific work situations and likely performance within a specific work role (Vecchio 1980; Trompenaars 1993). Moreover, it has been suggested that a consideration of the factors both shaping and meeting individuals’ expectations of work roles is critical for the likelihood of psychological contract violations and employee commitment (Feather and Rauter 2004). Various researchers have examined a range of different types of work goals. Here, we focus on two enduring dimensions in the literature: intrinsic and extrinsic work goals. Research on the antecedents of work goals typically takes one of two approaches: cultural explanations and individual values explanations.

**National Identity and Work Goals.** The first of these, which views national identity as the key determinant (e.g., Elizur, Borg, Hunt and Beck 1991), draws explicitly on the work of Hofstede (1980, 2001). The effect of national identity on an individual’s work goals is founded on the view that an individual’s values in life are shaped by immediate family, societal and cultural norms, values and beliefs, which form “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another” (Hofstede 2001: 9). This collective programming, Hofstede contends, is largely found at a national level. He therefore posits that national identity will have a significant impact on (among other things) work goals.

Hofstede’s work has proved highly influential in a wide range of areas in cross-cultural business and management research (Roe and Ester 1999). For instance, cross-cultural management research explores how national identity shapes individual values and, hence, a range of individual level work-related goals, values and behaviours (Akthar 2000; Bigoness and Blakely 1996; Borg and Galinat 1986; Keilor and Hult 1999; Ronen 1985; and Sverko 1995). In organisational behaviour and HRM, a number of researchers have suggested that goal-setting, job enrichment, and the design and use of performance-based pay are dependent on the national identity differences of the target workforce (Erez and Early 1993; Roe and Ester 1999). Most researchers have relied on a single dimension from Hofstede’s framework, namely ‘individualism-collectivism’ (Akthar 2000; Singlis
These findings provide us with our first hypothesis concerning the relationship between work goals and national identity:

**H1:** National identity will shape an individual’s intrinsic and extrinsic work goals.

Individuals from collectivist cultures will place greater (less) emphasis on intrinsic (extrinsic) goals, compared with individuals from individualistic cultures.

*Self-construal and work goals.* Along side, but often in critical opposition to this national identity approach, a number of researchers have questioned the focus on national identity on shaping individual values. From this perspective, individuals are viewed as construing a range of personal values separately from those which may derive from national identity (Markus and Kitayama 1991; Marsella, Devos and Hsu 1995; Triandis 1989b). Singelis (1994: 581) defined ‘self-construal’ as a “constellation of thoughts, feelings and actions concerning one’s relationships to others, and the self as distinct from others.”

From this perspective, an individual whose national identity is collective may nonetheless conceive of self in relatively strong individualist terms, valuing personal freedom, expression and independence (Miller 1998; Triandis, Leung, Villareal and Clack 1985; Triandis and Suh 2002). In order to distinguish between the national identity dimensions of collectivist-individualist and individual self-construal of values, Markus and Kitayama’s (1991) distinguish between two levels of self-construal: independent and interdependent. Individuals “with a well-developed independent self-construal stress self-actualizing and developing the abilities to be independent from others” (Kwan, Bond and Singelis 1997: 1043). In contrast, individuals “with a well-developed interdependent self-construal emphasize getting along with others and developing the abilities to fit harmoniously into their social environment” (Kwan et. al 1997: 1043). This distinction has subsequently been widely

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1 Individualist national cultures are defined as those in which the social ties between individuals are loose and where self-interest and the interests of one’s immediate family represent primary obligations over larger communal or social obligations. In contrast, collectivist cultures are defined by the extent to which individuals are integrated into strong cohesive groups that define their identity and social status. Collectivist cultures are those where individual interests may be subordinate to organisational, communal or societal goals or interests (Hofstede, 2001).
used by other researchers (Singelis 1994; Kwan et al 1997; Grace and Cramer 2003). This literature provides us with our second hypothesis:

**H2:** *Self-construal will have significant impact on both intrinsic and extrinsic work goals.*

*National Identity and Self-Construal.* While the empirical research has supported an analytical differentiation between the national identity and individual self-construal levels of value orientations, there is also substantial support for the view that national identity will leave its distinctive imprint on self-construal (Marsella, De Vos and Hsu 1995; Shweder and Bourne 1984; Triandis 1989a). Triandis and Suh (2002), for instance, maintain individuals can simultaneously hold both collectivists values drawn from national identity, while construe individual values which promote self expression and independence. These aspects of the self “form a universe of cognitions from which an individual draws (or samples) when confronted with social situations” (Singelis 1994: 581). This perspective has implications for investigating work goals and values. To begin with individuals may derive work goals and values which stem from both their national identity and the process of self-construal. Second, work goals may, like individual values, consist of both collectivist identity values and independence through self-construal. Here we follow Green and Pratkanis (1984), Baumeister (1986) and Triandis (1989b) and posit that self-construal may mediate the relationship between national identity and behaviour by examining the relationship between national identity, self-construal and work goals.

**H3:** *The relationship between national identity and work goals will be mediated by self-construal.*

*Cultural Adaptation.* Changes in individual behaviour and cognition when in direct contact with a new culture has been defined as cultural adaptation (Berry, Kim, Minde and Mok 1987, Nilsson and Anderson 2004). Cultural adaptation entails the acquisition of values, norms and behaviours from a host culture by a minority group within a given society (Gordon 1978, Garcia and Lega 1979). The degree to which this adaptation takes place is an ongoing debate within the literature (Nilsson and Anderson 2004). The sample in this study consisted of individuals who have resided in Australia at
varying lengths enhancing the importance in testing for effects of cultural adaptation on the work goals of these individuals. Based on the above the following hypothesis was developed.

**H4:** The relationship between the national identity, and self-construal and work goals will be moderated by the extent of cultural adaptation.

**METHODS**

**Procedure.** The data used in this study is drawn from a survey administered to undergraduate students enrolled in management units at a Melbourne university. While there are good reasons to conduct work goal research across a wide range of persons, reflecting a diversity of occupations, industries, life stages, and so on, student samples have nonetheless been widely used in cross-cultural research (Benner & Tomkiewicz 1982, Bu and McKeen 2001, Hartung, Speight and Lewis 1996).

**Sample.** In order to capture diverse national identities, it was decided to target three groups: Australian-born (individualistic), South-East Asian (high collectivist) and African (collectivist) students. The Asian sample was developed by combining responses from Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Indonesia and China. This was justified given that a number of studies have found this group to have similar values (Chatterjee and Pearson 2002, Lim 2001, Spector, Cooper, Poelmans, Allen, O’Driscoll, Snchez, Siu, Dewe, Hart, Lu, De Moraes, Ostrognay, Sparks, Wong and Yu 2004). The decision to include African students was made as the vast majority of studies on cross-cultural differences focus on Asian and Western cultures, excluding Africa. Hence one of our primary aims was to fill a gap in this empirical work. The African sample was also drawn from culturally similar countries, which have been identified as collectivists (Harvey, Carter and Mudimu 2000).

The survey was administered in mid-2004 to 400 business students enrolled in management and human resource management majors. Of these, 167 completed surveys were return, yielding a response rate of 42%. Of the 167 returned surveys, 133 fitted into the three target groups and were used in this analysis.
**Measures.** Table 1 shows the number of items, definition, and operationalisation of the questions used in the study. Exploratory factor analysis confirmed that all multiple item measures showed discriminant and convergent validity. Cronbach’s alpha for final variables used ranged from .65 or above, indicating that all measures were reliable. The measurement of the variables will be discussed in turn.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>No. of items</th>
<th>Definition/Operationalisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <strong>Intrinsic rewards (INT)</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>A Job that is intellectually stimulating, challenging, provided a feeling of accomplishment, allowed one to work independently, and utilise own methods in completing the job. Adapted from Bu and McKeen (2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <strong>Extrinsic rewards (EXT)</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>A job with opportunities for higher income, comfortable working conditions, and job security. Adapted from Bu and McKeen (2001).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <strong>Self-construal (SC)</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>An individual’s view of self influencing his/her perceptions, values, goals and behaviours. Adapted from Singelis (1994)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. <strong>National Identity (NI)</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Nationality by Birth. Adapted from Hofstede (1980, 2001), Australia = 1, South-East Asia = 2, Africa = 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. <strong>Cultural adaptation (CA)</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Level of acculturation as a proportion of one’s age. Adapted from Sodowsky and Plake (1992), length of residence in Australia / Age = cultural adaptation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two measures of *work goals* were included in the study: intrinsic (INT) and extrinsic (EXT) rewards. Each of these measures consisted of self report items, measured on a five point likert scale adapted from Bu and McKeen (2001). Intrinsic rewards was measured as the mean of a 5 item scale \( (\alpha=.76) \), while the extrinsic rewards factor was measured as the mean of 3 items \( (\alpha=.76) \). *Self-construal* (SC) was measured using Singelis’ (1994) scale. In his study Singelis (1994) found the 24 item self-construal scale factoring equally into two dimensions: independence \( (\alpha=.69) \) and interdependence \( (\alpha=.73) \). However, for the purposes of this analysis, these two factors were forced to a single factor \( (\alpha=.65) \) to assess the mediational effect of self-construal on the relationship between national identity and work goals. Both *national identity* (NI) and *cultural adaptation* (CA) were single item measures. National identity was measured by asking respondents to nominate the country in which they were born whilst cultural adaptation was measured as a proportion of the number of years one has spent in Australia to his/her age. Strong support is found for length of residence as an effective measure of

**Analysis.** The statistical technique used in the analysis was hierarchical multiple regression, testing for both mediating and moderating effects. Whilst Baron and Kenny (1986), recommend structural equation modelling where there are multiple constructs, this methodology is less appropriate where there are single indicator measures (McClelland and Judd 1993). Mediation requires three conditions to be met: (1) a significant relationship between the independent and the mediating variables; (2) a significant relationship between the mediator and the dependent variables, and (3) a non-significant relationship between the independent and dependant variables once the mediator is added to the model. Baron and Kenny (1986) recommend the following procedure for simultaneously testing mediation and moderating effects:

**Step 1:**
Dep. Var. (INT, EXT) = \( a + \beta_i (NI + CA + NI*CA) + e \).

**Step 2:**
(a) Med. Var. (SC) = \( a + \beta_i (NI + CA + NI*CA) + e \).
(b) Dep. Var. (INT, EXT) = \( a + \beta_i (NI + CA + SC + NI*CA) + e \).

**Step 3:**
(a) Dep. Var. (INT, EXT) = \( a + \beta_i (NI + CA + SC + NI*CA + NI*SC) + e \).
(b) Dep. Var. (INT, EXT) = \( a + \beta_i (NI + CA + SC + NI*CA + CA*SC) + e \).

**Results.** An initial analysis of descriptive statistics and partial correlations (these tables are not included) revealed that, as expected, respondents from our two collectivist national identities placed greater emphasis on intrinsic rewards than did Australian respondents. Gender differences in responses were also examined. With the exception of the African sample, no gender differences were evident. In that case, women reported a significantly higher value on intrinsic rewards than men.

Tables 2 shows the results of the multiple regressions analysing the mediating effect of self-construal, and the moderating effect of adaptation, on the relationship between national identity and work values.

Step 1 examined the impact of national identity, cultural adaptation and the interaction between these two variables on work goals. All three variables were significantly related to intrinsic rewards (\( p<0.05 \)). The significant effects of both national identity and cultural adaptation provides some initial
support for mediation, while the significance of the interaction term provides initial support for our prediction that national identity would be moderated by cultural adaptation. Step 2 then provides direct evidence of the mediation effect of self-construal on national identity. The first part of this step involved regressing national identity (b = 0.46, t = 2.23, p < 0.05), cultural adaptation (b = 0.81, t = 1.20) and an interaction between national identity and cultural adaptation (b = -0.60, t = -1.06) on our mediation variable, self-construal. The second part of Step 2 involved regressing national identity, self-construal, cultural adaptation and the interaction between cultural adaptation and national identity on our dependent variable. Evidence of mediation between national identity and self-construal is confirmed by first, finding a significant relationship between national identity and self-construal (p<.05); second by national identity no longer being a significant predictor of the dependent variable once self-construal is accounted for; and third, by self-construal significantly affecting the dependent variable (p<.01). Finally, given the fact that the interaction term (between national identity and cultural adaptation) remains significant in both Steps 1 and 2(b) (p<.05), there is direct evidence of a moderating relationship between the two variables.

The final step involved regressing all variables, including an interaction between our independent and mediator variables, on the dependent variable. The purpose of doing so is to rule out the possibility that our mediator in fact moderates the relationship between the independent and dependent variable. Barron and Kenny suggest that if the significance of the hypothesised interaction term is reduced in moving from step 2(b) to step 3, then our mediator in fact moderates the relationship between the independent and dependent variables (a ‘mediated moderation’). In this final regression, the interaction term remained significant at the same level (p<.05), along with self-construal (p<.01), while the interaction between self-construal and cultural adaptation was not significant, thus suggesting no mediating moderation. Step 3(b) the included an interaction between the moderator and mediator. The purpose of doing so is to assess whether the hypothesized mediation between national identity and self-construal is moderated by cultural adaptation (a ‘moderated mediation’ to use Barron

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2 In fact the NI term was significant at the 10% level, although this level of significance was not relied on anywhere in our analysis. However, the results of Sobel (1982) tests (s = 2.210, p = 0.026) confirmed mediation.
and Kenny’s terminology). This term was not significant, so the possibility of moderated mediation is rejected.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

We make three general points about the results. First, we can say that overall, the results support key elements of our model in relation to intrinsic rewards, while in the case of extrinsic rewards, neither national identity nor self-construal appeared to shape work goals. Second, we can say, again, in relation to intrinsic rewards, national identity was mediated by individual level orientations (ie, self-construal), and that the impact of national identity was moderated by the extent to which individuals had adapted culturally to Australian values. Again, nationality or individual self-construal did not appear to shape extrinsic rewards as a work goal. These results in turn will be explored further to offer more promising explanations.

Results found for work goals of intrinsic and extrinsic rewards can be explained in two ways. First, the relative deprivation experienced throughout their history by South-East Asians and Africans of the opportunity to excel as individuals rather than as a collective might have lead to greater determination of these individuals to fulfil their quest for material wealth (Bu and McKeen 2001). Second, the convergence theory postulated by Ralston, Holt, Terpstra and Chung (1996) implies that as national become industrialised in the modern global village, individuals would embrace common values and accepted behaviour, even if these values and behaviours are different from those nurtured by their own national identities (England and Lee 1974).

Triandis (1989a) presented self-construal as a mediator between national identity and individual behaviour. Triandis believed variables such as types of national identities one is exposed to, having parents from two contrasting national identities, and individual strength lead to the development of coexisting independent and interdependent values and behaviours resulting in unique value orientations of individuals. Thus, one’s self-construal is found to mediate the impact of the more traditionally developed national identity values on individual work-goals. Once more, the convergence
theory provides support to Triandis’ theory as individuals are increasingly exposed to differing value orientation in the modern world.

The significance found of cultural adaptation as a moderator can be explained by the diversity of the sample used in the study. Two thirds of the sample consisted of individuals who were part of a minority within the national identity in which the study was conducted. Empirical research has found individuals of minorities to change their values and behaviours to more closely approximate that of the dominant majority to improve interpersonal relationships (Thomas and Ravlin 1995; Black and Mendenhall 1991; Graham and Sanyo 1984). Therefore, it is plausible that the significance of cultural adaptation as a moderator is based on the efforts made to improve interpersonal relationships with the dominant majority by individuals to a minority.

Theoretically the result found reaffirmed the previously established relationships between national identity, self-construal and work goals. Furthermore, an individualisation or westernisation of traditionally collectivist values was discovered. The present study identifies the importance of assessing the mediational impact of self-construal and the moderating effect of cultural adaptation in shaping individual work goals. The findings highlights the importance of managing an ethnically diverse workforce, aspects needed to be integrated into organisational human resource development programs for both managers and employees, and the important role played by self-construal in assisting employees on international expatriate assignments to successfully cope with cultural adaptation requirements (Jun and Gentry 2004; Jassawalla, Truglia and Garvey 2004).

A limitation of the present study was the use of a single composite self-construal variable as opposed to the independent, interdependent (Singelis 1994) and more recently established power distance (Grace and Cramer 2003) self-construes. Future research should assess the proposed hypotheses using these different self-construes. It is also important to assess the impact of national identity, self-construal and cultural adaptation on more modern work goals such as leading a balanced life. Future cross-cultural research on work goals should attempt to utilise more diverse samples, especially of those individuals from Africa and those who are already employed.
References


Table 2
Determinants of Work Values: Regression Analysis of the Mediating Role of Self-Construal and the Moderating Role of Adaptation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Intrinsic Rewards</th>
<th>Extrinsic Rewards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>s.e.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>0.50*</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Adaptation</td>
<td>1.93*</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality x Cultural Adaptation</td>
<td>-1.37*</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2 (b)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Adaptation</td>
<td>1.63*</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-construal</td>
<td>0.37*</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality x Cultural Adaptation</td>
<td>-1.15**</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 3 (a)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Adaptation</td>
<td>1.64*</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-construal</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality x Cultural Adaptation</td>
<td>-1.15*</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality x Self-construal</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 3 (b)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>-0.39</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Adaptation</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>2.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-construal</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality x Cultural Adaptation</td>
<td>-1.16*</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality x Self-construal</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Adaptation x Self-construal</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>0.63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Self Construal (mediator) is the dependent variable. **p<0.01, n=133.